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ABSTRACT

Based on experiences in supervising student teachers of French and Russian at the secondary level, this paper examines the relationship between the student teacher of a foreign language in a secondary school and the supervising teacher in terms of the general and specific responsibilities of each. Suggestions and criticisms are offered concerning the preparatory work required of the supervising teacher, the initial period of the practice teaching experience, the role of the college supervisor, and evaluation procedures. (PMP)

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SUPERVISING A SECONDARY STUDENT TEACHER IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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This paper is based on my own observations and experiences with the supervision of student teachers in both French and Russian on the secondary level.

Introduction

"Your supervising teacher has been selected with a great deal of care and is considered by the Center and the School of Education to be a master teacher. Observe this master teacher carefully. He will approve your instructional plans and classroom activities. He will offer valuable suggestions and criticism concerning your Practicum teaching. Do not hesitate to use him as a resource person."[1]

In this manner the student teacher is placed truly in the apprentice role but in certain respects this so-called 'master" teacher is not immune to the possibility of learning some new techniques and methods, or experiencing a refreshing sense of humor or renewed enthusiasm. The valuable suggestions and criticisms as well as the idea of resource can be a cooperative venture by the teacher as well as the cadet.

There is no doubt the supervisor's role is based primarily on experience, the work he has done with all types of students, activities, administrators, and colleagues, and the student teacher is there to learn and participate. There needs to be a willingness to work not only for the needs of the students but for the needs of the student teacher and the supervisor, a mutual contract of respect for what each other may have to offer.

Personally I do not feel the supervising teacher can set himself apart as a "master" teacher. To me "master" teacher implies an extraordinary person and the term should be reserved for a very few. The supervisor should accept valid and honest assessments from a student teacher, weigh them in light of his own experience and the affect of the students involved. This is not to say the students are to become guinea pigs for the student teacher but the learning experience for the student teacher must involve somewhat of a personal approach.

The student teacher should not be placed solely in the position of learner for he has already learned much in and about his field. If he enters into this practicum phase with a sincere and enthusiastic desire to do his very best within an already structured system the supervisor should be more than just an evaluator but should be interested in what this person has to say. In like manner the student teacher may more willingly accept suggestions for improvement and in some cases realize that even with the amount of background courses, travel experiences and even emotional stability, there is indeed a great deal to learn from one who has had the time in experience.

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Preparatory Work

Before the student teacher arrives the supervising teacher should take the time to prepare for this person. Attitude is of particular importance and the supervising teacher should not regard this as a threat to his position or one of competition, especially in the classroom in front of the students. If this becomes a game to see which one is going to be liked more the whole experience will be infantile and disastrous.

After receiving the copies of transcripts and personal information of the student teacher it is the responsibility of the supervisor to go over this carefully. One should take note of possible courses where weakness was demonstrated as well as noticing courses where the individual seems to be strong. This should help the supervising teacher determine in which of his classes the student teacher may best fit in and, of course, the lesson activity for the period of time he will be working with the students.

Other information such as possible study or travel abroad, work with foreign exchange programs or students, counseling at language camps, would all be good reasons to take advantage of this individual's experience perhaps through a slide talk or by presenting some information about a particular program.

If possible it may also help to speak to some of the language instructors the student teacher has had in college, specifically a methods' teacher and perhaps the supervising teacher would have a little more insight into certain difficulties or be made aware of particular capabilities this individual has which may not be indicated in the written information given to the supervisor.

Finally the supervisor should inform his students that they will be having a student teacher, that you and this individual will be working together for their benefit and it will give them more of an opportunity to seek help for individual problems. It is important to stress that this person, even though still in training, is in a teaching capacity and should be given that courtesy. The students should be made aware that there may be a few pronunciation differences and pacing and timing of drills may at first be slow but the students should be reminded to be patient, keeping in mind that this initial period is actually a matter of becoming used to a new role, new textbook and a new atmosphere. They should try to be responsive and participate as much as possible to help the student teacher over that initial "hump". My own feeling is that this is all they need to be told or made aware of and if the students have given the student teacher a fair chance and have cooperated in helping him over that first "hump" and the student teacher has not responded positively, then it is the supervisor's right to remove him from the role or the classroom could soon become chaotic and undisciplined, valuable time wasted and both supervisor and students would be left with a negative attitude about cadet teachers.

Unfortunately many supervising teachers do not take the time to preplan and this is absolutely essential if the transit on in the classroom is to be a smooth one, benefiting pupil, teacher and cadet.

Initial Period

It is only common sense that the supervising teacher would acquaint the student teacher with the school and faculty. Much of this is done by the coordinator of student teachers and the administration. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to introduce the student teacher to specific individuals, such as other foreign language teachers, teacher aides, and counselors who can give additional suggestions or help outside the classroom.

From the first day the student teacher should be involved in some classroom activity whether it be checking papers, assisting in attendance, putting assignments on the board, or perhaps putting up a bulletin board. The supervisor should arrange to spend an extended conference period with the student teacher either the first or second day. During this time the basic format of the practicum period should be outlined, textbooks and manuals given to the student teacher and it is indeed helpful if the supervisor can have ready a brief outline of what the students have already covered such as verb tenses, pronouns, adjectives, general vocabulary, phonetic background, literature, etc. Seating charts should be available and if the students have been given names in the language this should be on the charts as well.

In regard to the observation--participation period, the Handbook II of the School of Education of the University of Montana says, "It is important that the function of these activities be clarified. This transition period is necessary for the Supervising Teacher and the Assistant to understand each other as cooperating professionals. The Assistant can come to appreciate that there are many ways of accomplishing academic goals. Through astute observation and participation, the sensitive Assistant will recognize the "style" that has been developed in the classroom, and through mutual clarification with the Supervising Teacher he can fit in his training and pre-professional in-school experiences."

The observation period is an extremely important one, often not emphasized enough and generally looked upon as a "boring period" for the student teacher. However, there are definitely some objectives which can be accomplished during this period if the student teacher and the supervisor decide on a specific format for each day of observation. For example, one day the student teacher should observe the reactions of the pupils to the various classroom activities, another day observe work habits during designated study time, or observe the techniques used by the teacher in presenting dialogues, dictées, cultural information, etc. The student teacher should keep a daily journal of what takes place in the classroom and jot down anything he may feel is pertinent to his own teaching experience, including any and all types of questions which come to mind during a class period.

I think it is an excellent idea for the supervising teacher to arrange for the student teacher to observe other teachers, especially other language teachers and see how they operate in similar atmospheres, noticing how methods, materials and pupil make-up can aid or hinder a foreign language program.

The observation period varies in length depending on the individuals involved but whenever this period comes to an end and the transition begins it should be done gradually so the pupil and cadet are not face to face abruptly. It is good to have the student teacher do something oral with the students so they can accustom themselves to pronunciation, intonation, volume, and pace. This introduction can be done by giving a dictee, a dialogue from a new unit or by presenting some oral drill patterns in the language. This initial participation should be limited to fifteen or twenty minutes for the first few days. This is a wonderful way for the classroom teacher to make use of the additional help for the individual needs of the students whether it be in small groups, during the language laboratory, while students are preparing assignments during class study time or for the never-ending make-up work. This gradual transition will make it much easier for the student teacher to take over the full class responsibility as he will be putting into practice as a whole what he has been working on in segments.

I firmly believe that if the student teacher is adequately prepared he should work with two different levels, especially for his own experience as most prospective teachers will be placed in a situation where they will have to teach at different levels, especially in a high school. Working with two different levels will also give the student teacher some variety and an opportunity to possibly expand his own creativity. If this be the case the patterns of the one teaching level should be quite well established before moving into the second.

During this participation period it is now up to the supervising teacher to observe what is taking place in the classroom. How often should one observe and how much observation are two questions frequently asked. This depends mainly on the individuals involved but I feel it is a good idea to allow the student teacher to be alone with the class for various periods of time. I also feel it is good to return to the classroom at the end of the practicum period and become oriented to the class and what has been accomplished during the "absence" of the regular teacher in order to make a smooth transition back into that position.

The supervisor should also keep a daily journal of what goes on in the classroom and it is through this journal that the teacher can base his final statements for the evaluation as well as being a daily reference for the conferences with the student teacher. A conference time should be held every day even if it is only for ten minutes. The student teacher should insist on this time as there needs to be a daily communication on what has been done and what needs to be done. The end of the week is an excellent time for an overall summary of what was accomplished and what should be planned for the following week. Lesson plans and prepared tests should always be gone over in advance in case changes need to be made.

Throughout the whole practicum period I have suggested the cadet keep track of any materials he may wish to use in his own future classroom, such as books, reference materials, addresses for films, filmstrips, records, tapes, language club programs, career opportunities in foreign language, various comments students may make in conversation about foreign languages, administration problems, faculty opinions of foreign languages, etc. Much of this is done in the language methods class but once within the school the student teacher can witness a great deal more.

The Role of the College Supervisor in the Field

It is highly commendable that some departments within the University and College systems will make themselves available and ask for the right of observing student teachers in their specific areas. From my own experience it has been more satisfactory for me to talk over a student teacher's activity with someone directly involved with the language rather than someone who may be looking only for the teaching ability. A supervisor from the University or the College in the field who is a teacher as well can be of tremendous help during a student teacher's practice period. If the visitation periods are made because of a general concern for the overall strengthening of the foreign language program in schools through the observation and evaluation of prospective foreign language teachers, I definitely feel this should be allowed to continue. In very few instances is a college supervisor in the field out to "attack" the foreign language program or the classroom teacher but if this person can be of assistance in helping to understand and solve possibly some problems not only with a cadet teacher but with the program in general, the classroom teacher should take advantage of his willingness to help. Perhaps in this manner the supervisor in the field will also become aware of problems the classroom teacher is facing and more of a communicative liaison could be established between foreign language departments of the secondary school and the College or University.

Evaluation

To help insure the strength of the field in foreign language teaching it is absolutely essential that the supervising teacher give considerable time and thought to the final evaluation. All areas should be reviewed, personal qualities, management and organization, instructional effectiveness and professional qualities.

Because of so much to be considered it would be invaluable to have video tapes of actual performances that a supervising teacher could view, perhaps with the student teacher or with other foreign language teachers or with the college supervisor in the field. One would be so much better equipped to analyze strengths and weaknesses and the teacher would not have to rely on recall and memory alone to justify what is said in the evaluation. Unfortunately, many schools are not so equipped but this affirms that the supervisor needs to keep a daily journal during the observation period and then the memory of the teacher will be better substantiated.

My personal feeling is that too many supervising teachers are too lax in this area of evaluation. Before the practicum period is completed I think the supervising teachers from all departments should get together and review with the coordinator the possible ratings and their values. In my opinion the superior ratings should be reserved for those student teachers who have shown "unusual originality, initiative, and ability to adjust".[2] If supervising teachers give too many superior ratings, even to those who are quite obviously "good-average", the inadequacy of the evaluating system will certainly deemphasize the quality of prospective teachers. The student teacher who has done

excellent work should not have to feel that his energies were wasted simply because someone else doing a mediocre job received the same rating. It is evident, for the most part, to tell which student teachers have done their practice teaching in earnest.

In education classes, methods' classes as well as with those people who are involved with the hiring of prospective teachers, it might be well to establish that a good rating or "B" is very acceptable and in most cases what is lacking could be remedied with experience. If student teachers, supervisors, coordinators, and administrators are constantly "A" or superior-oriented the whole evaluation system loses its effectiveness. Since the supply of teachers presently exceeds the demand it is necessary that supervisors and coordinators be selective and this can only be done by careful examination of the total practicum period of the cadet.

In foreign language it may be of particular help if the college supervisor in the field asked the supervising teacher to fill out a brief evaluation form in particular reference to the foreign language instruction. Many of the supervisors in the field do not have the time to visit many of the class sessions and when the practicum period has been completed the foreign language department, specifically the methods' course instructors may be interested in having a short description of the cadet's experience. Without the mention of names perhaps this resumé could be used within the methods' classes. Discussions, pro and con, could be conducted in regard to methods, techniques, innovations, etc., of the different teaching experiences. I think most supervisors in foreign language would be willing to write such a resumé, realizing that the College or University evaluation form is too general and <u>again</u> if the total program is to be strengthened within our secondary schools there must be a communication about these numerous and varied experiences of the student teacher.

In addition, I have one final suggestion in reference to evaluation. I believe it is definitely worthwhile for the student teacher to ask his students to evaluate himself <u>only</u> if it is done in regard to what the cadet did with the teaching. It is often done inappropriately as the student teacher becomes more concerned that the pupil evaluate him on the basis of personality or even more disastrous make a comparison between the teacher and cadet. This often leads to misrepresentations and false assumptions on the part of the student teacher. I suggest that perhaps within the methods' class sample evaluations, varying according to level of instruction and type, could be designed to be used as a guide by the student teacher at the end of his practicum period.

The evaluation by the pupils can be helpful, especially if several make the same general comments involving strengths and weaknesses, what they liked and disliked about the instruction, etc. However, this type of evaluation is beneficial only if the directed questions are valid.

Toward the end of the practice teaching some foreign language instructors of methods' courses have asked certain student teachers to speak to the class on their overall experiences. This, I feel, is an excellent idea if the college supervisor in the field uses his discretion in determining which student teachers would present an honest and informative presentation. There must be some

professional ethics involved as well as maturity on the part of the student teacher before he be considered to present such a talk or discussion. It is possible that without this careful consideration misrepresentations could lead to misconceptions and be detrimental to those involved.

Additional Comments

There is always room for improvement within the program of guiding and directing student teachers. There must be a constant evaluation of the total program and I believe this is especially important in foreign languages, as their struggle to survive in the secondary curriculum is becoming more difficult. Simply because some colleges and universities have dropped the language requirements, administrators often equate this with lack of importance and lack of interest. Our standards must be kept high, we must be selective despite some of the negative feeling about foreign language in the curriculum. Objectives of the foreign language should be expanded to include more students and their specific interests in foreign language and this can be accomplished quite effectively by more than adequately preparing our prospective teachers in foreign languages. The October, 1966 Modern Language Journal reestablishes the necessary goals of foreign language in its exposition, "Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages". This is an extensive and excellent reference for all involved with problems and objectives in teacher preparation in foreign languages.

Student teachers, supervising teachers, coordinators, college supervisors and others involved in education have all suggested longer periods of time for the cadet in the classroom. Certain programs are being worked out by various schools and institutions to accomplish this through student tutors, aides, or by classroom observation on the part of the prospective student teachers earlier in their college careers. "An internship prior to the practice teaching experience affords the beginning teacher the opportunity to solidify his working knowledge of the language sooner, without the pressure which accompanies student teaching, and without the apprehension which usually accompanies the striving for the best possible grade and the tension which is present during the visitations of the supervisor or the observations by the critic teacher. It also affords to the student-teacher the opportunity for closely supervised preparation and teaching only when he feels he is in absolute control of every aspect of the lesson knowing that there is no pressure, and being made aware of the fact that the permission to teach the class reflects the critic-teacher's confidence in him, the student teacher can be more relaxed and is more likely to succeed from the very outset. Subsequently because of his experience, he has more confidence in his ability from the first day of his practice teaching. He should be better acquainted with techniques and procedures, and the supervising teacher, in turn, should have more confidence in him and will be able to entrust the class to him without jeopardizing the quality of the teaching-learning situation. It gives the student-teacher a practical preview of teaching and acquaints him with the complexities of classroom procedure." It is our conviction that the task of the critic-teacher, as well as that of the student-teacher, will be easier when the program is fully developed."[3]

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FOOTNOTES

1. Jay, Robert H., & Casselman, Charles E., Handbook II, School of Education, University of Montana.

2. Handbook II.

3. Stevens, Leonard E., Southeast Missouri State College, "Teaching Interns", The French Review, December, 1967, p. 398.

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